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Consuming Brazil: Afro Brazilian Religion as a Base for Actor Training

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CONSUMING BRAZIL: AFRO BRAZILIAN RELIGION AS A BASE FOR ACTOR TRAINING

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts, Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Actor training, like the theatre in Brazil, has historically been a middle and upper class pursuit that followed European models, namely Stanislavski's system. Yet within Brazil there is a wealth of diverse cultures that are inherently theatrical and well suited for application in actor training. In this study I explore one such culture, the Afro Brazilian religion Umbanda. First, I examine its formation to illuminate how the religion itself performed (or served as a site for cultural interaction) throughout history. Then, I explore the practice of the religion both apart from and in relation to the theatre and Stanislavski's

system. Using the archetypes of Umbanda as a base, I formulate a system of actor training that both allows access to a larger demographic of Brazilians, and also encourages cultural dialogue as an explicit part of acting process. I frame this study with two metaphors: anthropophagy, the notion of cannibalizing or consuming one culture by another; and, more specifically, the digestive tract. The anthropophagy movement in Brazil framed the country's thought throughout much of the 20th century; the digestive tract is a closer examination of the consuming process that epitomizes this system of actor training.

CHAPTER 1 Prologue

In 1556 the bishop of the Brazilian state of Bahia, Pero Afonso de Sardinha, was merrily navigating the São Francisco River, probably pondering religious affairs and matters of state. While floating along in the heat of the Brazilian day, it is unlikely that he was contemplating the future irony of his name. His thoughts must have quickly shifted though, as he and his travel companions were captured and murdered by the Aimorés, a tribe of Americans native to the locale. According to legend, the Aimorés prepared Bishop Sardinha into a stew and, as they did with so many other enemies, ate him. I cannot help but wonder if the bishop tasted fishier than the usual enemy fare of that tribe, for his name literally means sardine (Budasz, 11).

This mythical legend is substantiated by the practices of some Americans native to Brazil. From the colonial record of the bishop's death at the hands (and mouths) of the Aimorés to modern film footage of the Yanomami of the Amazon consuming soup made from the ashes of a funeral pyre, there are several accounts of cannibalism, more formally known as anthropophagy, throughout Brazil's history (De Andrade; *The Laughing Alligator*). The motive for anthropohagy in the country's native population has generally been twofold: to incorporate the strength and memory of the enemy and/or to exact revenge. In neither case are the motivations based on mere nutritive consumption.

During the colonial era (that I mark as ending in 1888 with the end of slavery) stories about cannibals poured out of the country for careless consumption by Europeans almost as quickly as the sugar and coffee for which Brazil became famous. Even after the colonial period, these stories left Brazil and its entire citizenry open to the interpretation of being savage. In the 1920s poet and polemicist Oswald de Andrade elected to use the concept of anthropophagy as a guide for the recreation and reinterpretation of Brazil. In his 1928 *Manifesto Antropofágico* (*Cannibalist Manifesto*) he laid the foundations for a new, modernist nation that separated itself from the notions of foreigners. The premise of this work resonated with the country's intelligentsia such that it became the model of Brazilian thought towards its own existential nature, its own Brazilianness as it were, until the 1960s. Included in this premise were the notions that western high culture was a sum of artificial contrivances, and that true humanity in Brazil began with action when the natives first consumed Europeans. To de Andrade true knowledge was only gained when the knowledge of the other was consumed. De Andrade did not judge as to whether or not it was accomplished in the past by actually eating the flesh of the other, though he was more a proponent of ideologically consuming the other for the incorporation of new knowledge. In the words of art critic Paulo Klein, anthropophagy is "a voracious appetite to devour both the intelligence and the fluids of the one chosen, in order to be born again as a revived animal" ("Anthropophagous").

CHAPTER 2 Introduction

It is the ultimate goal of this study to enter into dialogue the theatre (as epitomized by Stanislavski's method) and the Afro Brazilian religion Umbanda. My aim is first to explore how this particular religion has continuously utilized the elements necessary for performance of works from the canon of western theatrical literature. Then I suggest some techniques extrapolated from Umbanda to teach acting to interested members of the population who would otherwise be unable to have access to costly or class-based actor training. These techniques can introduce into the theatre a different paradigm of performance that explores the possibilities of nationhood, pluralism, and socioeconomic equity by way of ritual and religious culture—basically a way of increasing and espousing Brazilianness on stage. The purview of this paper takes on a rather winding route inspired by anthropophagy, i.e. modeled after the digestive process from start to finish. The third chapter, "Cornucopia," presents Umbanda as a form that already performs multiple functions in Brazil and the world at large. Performance in this chapter extends far beyond the bounds of the theatre as entertainment or even as vehicle for social change. Rather, at its base it looks at performance as a function of all interaction, including the interpersonal,

the intra-, inter-, and multicultural.[1] Beyond human interaction, performance in this context examines the possibility of ideas and institutions "acting" on the stage of life, or even more broadly, throughout history.

The fourth chapter, "A Hard Pill to Swallow," can accurately be subtitled "What's Stan Got That I Don't?" I begin this chapter with an account of an evening that I spent at an Umbanda center in São Paulo Brazil in 2004. I render this account through the lens of performance and theatre, making sure to identify such theatrical conventions as spectators/audience, actors, script, and stage in a context that would normally be viewed as a religious event. Later I highlight key components of Stanislavski's method, the predominant mode of actor training throughout Brazil. Then, referring back to the evening at the religious center, I identify how these components are either explicit or implicit parts of the spiritual practice in Umbanda.

In the following chapter, "Churned Together: Umbanda Performs Theatre," I explore the processes and products in two past case studies where the religion was either consciously or subconsciously utilized or tapped into in performances of western theatre on the Brazilian stage. In these cases, only particular aspects of spiritual practice make an appearance onstage, whereas in the sixth chapter, 'In the Gut Now,' I propose a model of actor training resulting from a conscious admixture (or churning) of theatre concepts with the archetypes and stories from Umbanda. Chapter seven, entitled 'Digestion and

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[1] Extrapolated from the definitions of varying cultural theatre forms that Patrice Pavis elucidated in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, the intracultural has to do with components or participants from within a nation; the intercultural has participants from distinct cultural areas often outside the bounds of one nation; the multicultural pulls from participants of differing linguistic and cultural paradigms within a nation with the express purpose of espousing the plurality of the state (5,8).

Indigestion,' moves into the realm of future possibility to project the results of as well as the implications for the Brazilian stage of this new system of actor training.

Before proceeding with the study, I would like to address the question, "Why not just stick with the principles of Stanislavski?" While it is not my intention to devalue the work of Stanislavski, there are a few key aspects of how it is practiced in Brazil that renders it culturally inaccessible to the vast majority of the country's population. As with so many artistic trends throughout world history, the prizing of Stanislavski's method is a reflection of Brazil's valuing of European high culture. Though possibly unintentional, this valuing is to the detriment and neglect of the particularly rich mixture of subcultures within its own boundaries that could even further characterize Brazilian theatre. Outside of the method of theatre training I propose, Brazilian artists and lay citizens are by no means bereft of cultural knowledge pertaining to their own "Brazilianness." Carnival, the internationally renowned, licentious celebration of the country's nationhood, elucidates this concept of self-knowledge and awareness as it permeates every stratum of Brazil's citizenry. I believe that the Brazilian theatre in process and product (to some extent) should be a confirmation of this Brazilianness.

The second, and for me even more troubling aspect of Stanislavski's method in Brazil is its lack of accessibility for economic reasons. Theatre training in Brazil today is found primarily in two venues, university programs and private studios. While this is similar to many countries throughout the West, Brazil's academic and economic structure is not conducive to allowing most of its citizenry the opportunity to study acting. While the Brazilian culture that is exported reflects the opulence of carnival and exotic beaches

such as Copacabana, economically and educationally this country is unmistakably third world. According to the Library of Congress:

> Brazil is marked by great inequalities, with a highly developed university system at one extreme and widespread illiteracy at the other […] In 1995 the federal government was spending almost twice as much on the universities as on basic education, which is the primary responsibility of states and municipalities. Local governments often paid teachers wages that were well below the legal minimum… Despite […] progress, less than 40 percent of the high school-age population [in 1990] was enrolled in school. ("Brazil – Education")

While the purview of the study from which I retrieved this information covered between 1986 and 1998, my recent visits to and interviews conducted at Brazilian high schools and universities reveal that not much has changed. As is characteristic of most third world countries, the financially underprivileged are the ones who are most victimized by the country's widespread educational inequality.

The entrance exam required for consideration to any Brazilian college or university, the Vestibular, dwarfs America's SAT or ACT examinations in level of difficulty. The students who happen to finish high school and can raise enough money spend several months in private courses designed to help students pass this highly complicated exam. If students do not score well, they miss the chance of being able to attend one of the better public institutions that even have a theatre program. Their only other option for higher education if they have enough money, is to attend one of a number of private institutions,

the vast majority of which do not have theatre programs. Since much of Brazilian youth today does not fall into the economic categories that allow them to continue on to higher education, it almost seems unthinkable that they would utilize what resources they have to learn Stanislavski's method (or any other form of theatre for that matter) in a private studio. I do not believe that every Brazilian must learn to be an actor, but I do believe they should be able to if they so desire. Maybe this method I propose will allow more Brazilians to do so.

Chapter 2 Glossary

Brazilianness: A measure of Brazil's national Character.

Culture vs. Subculture: Culture in this paper is the mores, values, norms, and practices (profane and/or sacred) of a unified group of people. I will later make references to the cultures of various different groups of Africans. These references speak to the Africans in Brazil before they blended in to Brazilian culture, a process that could take a few generations. After that blending I would consider these people Afro Brazilian, and their ways, values, norms, etc., would be a subset or subculture of the unified Brazilian culture.

Nationhood: Nationality; the status as a nation; or, the strength of a nation.

Pluralism: The state or ability for one thing, in this case the Umbanda religion, to serve or be understood in many capacities. For example, while Umbanda serves its practitioners in

their spiritual progress, it also has served as a site for the cultures several different peoples—Native Americans, Africans, and Europeans et al.—to come together.

Religion: For my purposes, a set of spiritual practices organized in a community environment. I use this term interchangeably with spiritual practice, though spiritual practice indicates more of the actual activities that take place.

Ritual: In this paper, ritual is a set of sacred activities repeated within a religious congregation.

CHAPTER 3 Cornucopia: Umbanda Performs Everything

In this section of the study, I present Umbanda as a cornucopia, i.e. a religion containing the abundance of roles that it has performed since the very beginning of Brazil's formation. In the view of performance I am assuming here, the "roles" being played go far beyond those of simple (or even complex) characters in a play. Rather, they are more allegorical in a poststructuralist sense. Instead of looking at the allegorical characters of concepts such as good acts, knowledge, wealth, etc. as in the medieval morality play *Everyman*, I will explore characters such as resistance, race, regionalism, etc. in what could be conceived of as a "Church of Postcolonial Identity."

This feast of abundance opens with an exposition, in this case, the history of this particular strand of Afro Brazilian religion. This history begins in 1908, though we will find several older roots of Umbanda as we begin to unload the cornucopia of roles that the religion has played throughout the nation's history.

In 1908 a seventeen-year-old boy by the name of Zélio de Morais from Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, unintentionally brought about a major shift in Brazil's religious scene. Under the auspices of a more African-centered religion he was learning and practicing the art of channeling into his body the spirits of African gods and goddesses. One day he brought in

an unexpected guest, when he channeled the spirit of a Native American who was a few centuries of age and went by the name of Sete Encruzilhadas (Seven Crossroads). Once comfortably in possession of the young boy's body, Sete Encruzilhadas announced the coming of a new religion called Umbanda in which the spirits of not only African traditions, but also of native Brazilian ethnic groups as well as several colonial social types would be incorporated into the spiritual practice.[2]

Soon after the appearance of Sete Encruzilhadas, Morais opened a center—the first Umbanda *terreiro*[3]—in which many followers were trained as mediums in spirit possession in order to work with numerous types of spirits to the ends of healing and advising people regarding worldly and spiritual affairs (Sarceni and Xaman, 17-23). Many individuals involved with this spiritual center later made adjustments to the religion and spread their new variants—also under the name Umbanda—to cities throughout the country. As the religion spread, it attracted a variety of followers, particularly from the lower and working classes. As the religion developed, however, so did its metropolitan nature as reflected in both its practice and the followers. It became increasingly common for a religion that attracted spirits of various social and economic classes to also attract practitioners from a broad demographic in Brazil. Though coming from an array of socioeconomic backgrounds, participants in the spiritual practice would come to *terreiro*s to partake in the religious experience centered primarily around the event of spirit possession and consultation.

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[2] These social types included former priests and priestesses of African-based religions, mariners, colonial politicians and religious figures, marginalized pimps, and prostitutes among others.

This brief history sets the stage for unveiling the feast of performance contained in the cornucopia of Umbanda. Just as the cornucopia is the container of all the foods it holds, so is Umbanda a repository for several functions contained therein. We begin the first course with hybridity. So far in alluding to African influences on Umbanda, I may have insinuated that there was only one set of African practices that contributed to the religion's formation. In fact, this process was not at all so singular. The Portuguese, who would later leave the Iberian Peninsula to colonize Brazil, began interfacing the religious practices of Africans as early as the 16th century. Around this time the first Portuguese Jesuits voyaged to the Congo with the goal of converting natives. Eventually the Portuguese range of contact with Africans covered much of central, southern, and West Africa; from this range they enslaved millions of Africans from various tribes of the Congo, Bantu, Fon, Yoruba, Angola, and Guinea, among others, to export to Brazil.

When these displaced Africans arrived at the plantations in Brazil that were to become their new residences and places of servitude, their spiritual practice underwent change by force of Portuguese treatment of slaves. The colonizers made it their practice to separate incoming Africans from their contemporaries. While there were not enough African ethnic groups present in colonial Brazil to avoid having slaves from similar tribes on any one plantation, owners took great care in their purchasing practices in order to keep their African populations heterogeneous. The prevailing premise at the time was that if purchases of slaves were staggered enough, newcomers would have little in common with older "broken" slaves both culturally and linguistically (the older slaves having many

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[3] *Terreiro* is the Brazilian word for a center of African-based worship. It is derived from the Portuguese for

times adopted a pidgin Portuguese over their first language) regardless of being from similar ethnic backgrounds (Mattoso, 125-131). Under the duress of this purchasing system, the religious impulse amongst the slaves had to manifest in hybridization, a mix of the spiritual practices of the aforementioned ethnic groups.

While generalizations can and have been made as to the commonalities amongst the religions of Africa, the particular differences also truly abound between them. In Brazil this resulted in a hybridization that eventually contributed to the Umbanda religion, though reconciling the spiritual differences amongst the various ethnic groups meant that they were not all evenly represented. Many of the Bantu religions during the epoch of Brazilian slavery focused on worshipping specific ancestors as well as localized nature deities. As the Bantu were removed from their native locales and people, the genealogy of their ancestors as well as the specific rivers and forests of central and southern Africa that were once their deities were quickly distanced and later abandoned. The Yoruba of present-day Benin and Nigeria, however, brought with them a cosmological system that was closely related to the forces of nature as archetypes. Instead of worshipping one river in what is now Benin, they worshipped the spirit associated with all rivers. As such, their religious world was much more portable than those of other Africans exported to Brazil. The spiritual world view of the Yoruba, therefore, led in the process of religious hybridization amongst the slaves, and this view most strongly appears in the Umbanda centers throughout Brazil and the world today (though some subtle influences of the practices of other African ethnicities still remained).

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land, terra.

The hybridization of spiritual practices took place not just between the various types of Africans present during Brazil's colonial era. The most significant hybridization resulted from the interfacing of African traditions with those of Brazilian Catholics. This aspect of spiritual admixture cannot, however, be separated from the second course of our horn of plenty, religious resistance. Referring again back to the first days of Portuguese contact with Africans on their own continent, the start of their interaction was marked by efforts to subjugate and replace the polytheistic and animistic religions of the natives with Roman Catholicism (also arguably polytheistic and at times animistic). This subjugation became even more oppressive in Brazil as the Portuguese encouraged and often forced displaced Africans to convert to Catholicism. While the colonizers often espoused these conversions as a testament of Christian achievement and charity, the slaves rarely had structured opportunities to worship the new god Jehova. On plantations, slaves generally did not practice this foreign religion until the rare event that a missionary happened to visit. In cities, Catholicism was practiced conventionally in churches and socially in confraternities, neither of which were widely available to people of African descent in Brazil until the 18th century, over 200 years after the displaced peoples first set foot on American soil. Forced out of the milieu and practices necessary for their former religions, and bereft of opportunities to manifest their spiritual impulses through the Catholic Church, maintaining African ways of spirituality at any cost became a means of resisting the systematic religious oppression of the colonizer (Mattoso, 125-127).

On occasion, slaves were able to congregate outside of the view of owners and religious figures to overtly enact what spiritual practices they retained from Africa. These

opportunities, however, were few in number, and what resulted in order for the slaves to continue their worship harkens back to the philosophical concept of anthropophagy. Through the practice of syncretism, mixing together two or more beliefs, displaced Africans continued fulfilling their impulse to practice religion while fooling their oppressors in order to survive. In a sense, these Africans consumed the religion of the oppressor and digested it into their own spiritual practice. All of the African archetypal gods and goddesses in this process cannibalized those saints, god- and goddess-like figures from Christianity.[4] For example, Xangô—whom the Africans generally worshipped as a capricious god of thunder, lightning, magic, and virility—found similarities between himself and the renowned Catholic scholar Saint Jerome. He therefore consumed and embodied the saint's identity, thereby giving the displaced Africans the option of worshipping him directly as a Yoruba god or indirectly in the guise of a Catholic saint when oppressive eyes were watching.[5]

Not just Xangô, but all of the Yoruba archetypal figures that would later constitute an important part of Umbanda, cannibalized figures from the Roman Catholic faith. The following is a chart of the primary Yoruba gods and goddesses that are part of modern Umbanda, the Catholic figures they consumed, and characteristics of both:

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[4] I would like to stress that this cannibalization happened in the realm of ideas. It has been far too easy over the course of history to associate Africans, Native Americans, and other non-Europeans with cannibalism. No flesh was truly eaten here; rather one idea of religion (the hybridized African practices) incorporated another (Catholicism).

[5] Again this description took place on the level of ideas. While I have found no documentation recording what the actual process of syncretization looked like, I highly doubt that it was enacted as a specific cannibalistic ritual. Rather, I believe it was something done more on the fly by those Africans who had enough exposure to the Catholic Church to bridge the two pantheons. Even though it is performed by archetypes, I talk about the cannibalization here as an active process as if performed by fleshly beings in order to stress that anthropophagy happened on many levels in relation to this study.

Table 1: Yoruba Deities and Their Corresponding Catholic Figures

Yoruba Deity (also called Orixá)	Catholic Figure
Exu	**The Devil**
A trickster god, he is the first of the gods that must be hailed in order to communicate with any of the other deities of the Yoruba pantheon. He can be a rebel, wanting people to cater to his whims before granting them what they wish.	Originally Archangel Lucifer, he pridefully staged a rebellion against Jehova's mandates and, along with his followers, was expelled from heaven. He then proceeded to tempt Adam and Eve with the fruit of the tree of knowledge, leading humanity into a downward spiral.
Iansã	**Saint Barbara**
Goddess of the winds, she lives a life akin to the storms she creates. She is known for her intense extremes: ebullient happiness, hedonistic pleasure-seeking, extreme pride, and uncontrollable anger. She is a warrior capable of unrelenting force when crossed. She is also a goddess of the marketplace and of death.	She possessed a beauty that her father, a wealthy aristocrat in Asia Minor, wished to profit from. After refusing to be married off, she was locked away in a tower where she was tutored in many disciplines including Christianity, to which she later converted. Eventually her father tortured and killed her. He was promptly struck dead by lightning after her death.
Iemojá	**Numerous Versions of the Virgin Mary**
The mother goddess of the ocean. Known for crying easily and being very sympathetic and caring for her children and all who follow her.	In Brazil she is revered as the mother of all purity and diversity. She made several appearances throughout the country: on stones, in rivers, etc., such that she was made patron saint of the country.
Nanã Buruku	**Saint Anne**

Actually adopted from the kingdom of Dahomey which preceded the Yoruba, she is the austere and harsh goddess of the deep waters and mud. She is responsible for the dead.	Mother of Mary, she is the patron saint of mothers in labor.
Obaluaiyê	**Saint Lazarus**
Once a womanizing braggart, he was humbled through illness and is now the god of healing.	In the biblical Book of Luke, this brother of Mary was brought back from the dead by Jesus. He is associated with the care of lepers.
Ogum	**Saint George** **Saint Anthony of Padua**
God of war and the forge, he generally retires to his blacksmithing in the forest only to emerge for war and conquests in the lands of men.	Valiant soldier in the army of Roman emperor Diocletian, Saint George was tortured and murdered because his faith compelled him to scold the emperor for his cruelty to Christians. Born into the Portuguese aristocracy in the late 12th century, Sain Anthony left to join the Franciscan order in Italy at the age of 26 with the hopes of dying as a martyr under the persecution of Christians that was taking place in Morocco at the time. He spent the next (and final) ten years of his life preaching to the illiterate throughout Europe.
Oxalá	**Jesus Christ**
Compassionate creator of all life on Earth, he is the son of the Yoruba version of God (Olorum). He is also considered the father of all the other gods and goddesses (orixás).	He is the son of the Christian god Jehova, and co-creator with his father of the world.
Oxóssi	**Saint Sebastian**
The quiet, pensive god of the hunt. He spends his time as a hermit communing with nature.	Patron saint of archers and soldiers, he was also a Roman Soldier under Diocletian and later Maximilian. He made many converts of

	the people he healed, and also advanced militarily before the emperor found out he was a Christian. When this occurred, he was ordered executed, shot with several arrows and left for dead. Yet he was found and recovered to seek out and denounce the emperor who had him beaten to death.
Oxum	**Mary, our Mother of Appearance**
The beautiful, coquettish, and melodramatic goddess of beauty and fresh water.	She first appeared as a statue caught in the net of three fishermen in 1717. She brought such prosperity to the fisherman in their profession that word spread and she was eventually was canonized as a patron saint of Brazil.
Xangô	**Saint Jerome**
Capricious and magnetic in personality, he is the god of thunder and lightning. Though vain, he is fair and is the king of justice.	Born in the late fourth century, his travels took him all over the (then) eastern and western worlds. He was the quintessential scholar, being a virtual walking library of sacred and profane texts of the contemporary and ancient worlds in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and other languages. He served as a human library and reference tool for the pope.

A number of the Yoruba deities have more than one Catholic saint associated with them, bringing us to the next course from the cornucopia. Recognizing that Brazil is a very large country with much cultural variation throughout, Umbanda is also a repository for the concepts of pluralism and regionalism.

As Umbanda spread throughout metropolitan centers and (eventually) into rural locales in 20th century Brazil, it met with several types of differing ways in which these Yoruba deities were already being worshipped. Using the example of the god of war, Ogum, many of the inhabitants of the former colonial capitol of Brazil, Bahia, had been

worshipping him under the guise of Saint Anthony Padua since the very early days of the Portuguese colony. By the time this religion traveled from its place of origin in Rio de Janeiro to the former colonial capital, Bahia, in the second decade of the 20th century, Ogum had picked up another saint for the purpose of disguise, this time Saint George. Both saints were valid candidates for blending with the Yoruba god of war and the forge. Saint George, a brave soldier of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, stood bravely before his emperor and scolded him for his cruelty to Christians. In the myths about the saint, he was purported to slay a dragon and save a fair maiden. Saint Anthony left the comfort of his Portuguese aristocratic background seeking to become a Franciscan in order to face a death by beheading in Northern Africa. Why one region of Brazil would syncretize Ogum as Saint George over Saint Anthony of Padua could be explained by a number of factors: a greater presence of snakes (which could be construed of as serpents or dragons) in Rio de Janeiro, a greater worship of Saint George than Saint Anthony in a particular area, etc. While this is subject to much conjecture, it is noteworthy that Umbanda contains a space for both possibilities, and in this way it provides a space for plurality to be performed in differing regional interpretations of archetypal figures.

This plurality is further expressed in the very personalities of the Yoruba gods and goddesses in Umbanda. Often archetypal deities can be expressed as monolithic and unbending in nature. In Umbanda each of the gods has a wide range of personal expression. As such, Ogum is not merely a stodgy, reclusive god of war; he, much like most people, functions in several modes depending on when he is engaged. These modes

for Ogum (as well as the other gods of Umbanda) are called falanges (literally, phalanxes, but in practical use, paths):

Table 2: Different Paths (Falanges) of Ogum

Path of Ogum	Characteristics
Ogum Beira-Mar – Ogum of the Coast	Responsible for the wet sands and processes involving purification.
Ogum Sete Ondas – Ogum of the Seven Waves	Works with the waves and also with purification.
Ogum Rompe-Mato – Ogum the Bushwhacker	Works in the forests with fellow god of the woods, Oxóssi
Ogum Das Pedreiras – Ogum of the Quarries	Works with the god Xangô in the quarries. Prefers to receive offerings made to him around stone quarries.
Ogum-Megê – The Ogum of Seven	Works with his wife Iansã and deals more with spirits than aspects of the material world.
Ogum-Narue – The Creator of Courage	Also works with spirits, more specifically with dispelling black magic.
Ogum Matinata – The Early Riser	Associated with protecting the flowered fields of the god Oxalá.
Ogum Iara - The Elder	Works with the goddess of fresh water, Oxum, and therefore likes to receive offerings by rivers and streams.
Ogum Delê – Ogum of the Law	He works with karma and atonement. He is responsible for making the Earth revolve.
Ogum Xoroque	Associated with the trickster god Exu, he is the most warrior-like and always ready to fight.

As these varying modes apply to all of the gods of Umbanda, followers of the religion worship not just ten, but up to one hundred archetypal figures (and maybe even more, depending on the region of Brazil). The followers of the religion, Umbandistas (ũbãd´istəs), not only worship these variations of the gods, but they embody them. Each

Umbandista has a filial association with one particular deity, and call themselves a child of that god or goddesses. Therefore, a daughter of Iemojá is entitled to the multiple expressions (falanges) of the mother goddess, as well as the expressions of Mother Mary.

This idea of plurality is further complicated by the other spirits that form the cornerstone of this religion. When Umbanda first appeared in Brazil's religious scene in 1908, it was not only the spirits of deceased Native Americans that decided they would enter the fray formerly dominated by African gods. Several different classes of spirits, mostly alive during the colonial era in Brazil also found their way into the religion. These spirits decided to work with mediums trained in the art of spirit possession in Umbanda in order to improve their karma. They would possess followers of the religion and then proceed to give spiritual advice and consultation to members of the community, and in so doing would better the past-life karma that both they and their human hosts had accumulated throughout their lifetimes. It is ironic that although they were working in Umbanda in an effort to slough off the remainders of their pasts, they would often express aspects of their former lives when possessing mediums in Umbanda centers (See table 3).

The table's description of races among the spirit classes illuminates that Umbanda is also a site where race is both implicitly and explicitly performed. The spiritual categories are listed in order of ascendancy within the religion. With the exception of the last three, each class of spirits grows ever closer in its ties to African ethnicity as it climbs up the metaphysical hierarchy. At the highest level of this spiritual class system are the Yoruba deities. Indeed, the remainder of the spirits in the religion is so far removed from the Yoruba pantheon that, regardless of their level of ascension, they will always serve a

greater, African spiritual force. The performance of this racial hierarchy and ascendancy comes into play as individuals from the various categories of spirits possess human bodies to perform their spiritual work. Within Umbanda it is not only possible, but common to see 20th-century, middle class, white Brazilians performing the consciousness of 16th-century Native Americans or 18th-century Afro Brazilians within the span of a few days or even a few hours. Implicitly, each medium performs a wide variety of races as their consciousness melds with the spirits of different classes and their body performs the ways and gestures of people different from their sociobiological background.[6] Explicitly, when spirits give advice to people that have problems in society based on race, the spirits may make statements that are not favorable to the race of the person they are possessing.

Table 3: Spirit Classes in Umbanda

Exu and Pomba Gira
This first class of spirits is not to be confused with the Yoruba god Exu. This class of spirits—Exu being the males, and Pomba Gira the females—has the most evolutionary work to undertake. In their human lifetimes they were prostitutes, governmental figures, thieves, corrupt priests—all either directly making a living by dubious means or by abusing positions of power. In Umbanda centers they rarely have qualms about performing spiritual work of a questionable nature. In most cases they are employed to counteract negative magic. Sometimes in sessions outside of *terreiro*s they are engaged to perform more malicious tasks involving black magic. It is not uncommon for these openly mischievous spirits to have been of European descent in their human lifetimes.
Boiadeiro
These boisterous spirits are a relatively close fit to the stereotype of the roughneck cowboy. Very direct and often abrupt when they interact with people, they often give advice while smoking cigarettes and drinking whiskey or beer. It is not uncommon for them to leave their assigned tasks in order to go and associate with other spirits, or even use a lasso as if they were in a

[6] I use the term sociobiological background in light of a growing body of genetic research that has indicated just how little difference there is between the races.

rodeo. The boiadeiro is the stereotypical mestizo, representing an ethnic mix of European, African, and Native Brazilian cultures. They were often Exus in their last spiritual incarnation.
Marinheiro
These maritime spirits were often men or women who sailed, traded, fished, pirated, or engaged in other ocean-associated activity during their human lifetimes. They are free agents, and often unfettered by the negative karma of the previous two spirit types. They often enter the bodies of their mediums already drunk, or at least seemingly so as they sway from side to side trying to balance the ocean currents of their human memory.
Baianos
Former residents of the northeastern state of Bahia, these spirits were most often initiated into some form of African-based religious practice in their human lifetimes. Having gained favor with the Yoruba deities as such, they enjoy a higher evolutionary status and are known for their astute observations of spiritual matters. In their consultations they are laid back and benefit from the earthly pleasures of fruit drinks and cigars from their former homeland. Though they are not necessarily of African descent, it is noteworthy that they were closely associated with African-derived religions in their human lifetimes.
Caboclos
The word caboclo in Portuguese refers to those indigenous Brazilians in the colonial era that adopted European values and were thus "civilized. Yet, the energy of the caboclo spirit in Umbanda *terreiro*s represents their state of being free and integrated in nature, unadulterated by European presence. They are direct and quick to reprimand people in their consultations. It is not terribly uncommon for them to hunt with bow and arrow in the sacred space devoted to their spiritual counseling sessions. Each of the caboclos are directly associated with a specific orixá for whom they work.
Preto Velho
In their human lifetimes these spirits were often enslaved Africans who managed to survive until reaching a ripe age despite the difficulty of their daily existence. They are humble, bent over spirits and are considered the embodiment of gentleness and wisdom. Upon entering the body of their mediums they begin to stoop until they sit what seems to be an arthritic body into a chair. Their soothing consultations are usually given in a gentle voice while puffing on cigars.
Sereias
Sirens or mermaids, these entities have never lived a human incarnation. Associated with one of three Yoruba water goddesses, these entities only communicate through chant and song.
Crianças or Erê
These spirits take on the form of children. They are quite a handful in

*terreiro*s as they play games and demand sweets, honey, and lollipops to satisfy their whims during consultations. Though they manifest as children, they are very old spirits that are highly in tune with nature.
Ciganos
These are the spirits of gypsies from throughout the world (not just the ones that had emigrated to Brazil), as well as some spirits from Eastern religions (e.g. Buddhism and Hinduism). Their energy, like the history of some of the peoples they represent, is often hidden and obscure.

Chapter 3 Glossary

Confraternity: A social organization prominent during the colonial era of Brazil (yet still existing today) with the goal of advancing a particular social, or in this case, religious agenda.

Cosmological System: Religion.

Hybridity: The state of discrete influences or practices being mixed together.

Hybridization: The coming together of two or more discrete practices to form a new blend, a hybrid. I use this term to refer mostly to various religious practices coming together to form Umbanda.

Karma: In Sanskrit, karma means action and also entails reaction or results of action. Karma builds as a database of all actions, good and bad, performed by a spirit throughout

many lifetimes. In this paper, karma is referred to more as the log of bad actions for which people and spirits are attempting to atone.

Medium: A person, generally trained in the Umbanda religion, who allows disembodied spirits to possess them. I use the verb "to channel" to describe their allowing the spirits in; "to possess" is the verb I use for the spirits claiming the bodies of mediums. Sometimes I use the verb "to incorporate," to go in or to allow in to the body, for both mediums and spirits.

Metropolitan: Reflecting the diversity found in a metropolis. This refers to the various classes, regions, and races of the practitioners of the Umbanda religion.

Postcolonial Identity: The postcolonial in the temporal sense refers to the period that comes after the end of the colonial state in a country. In this study, though, I am not referring to the time after Brazil became its own entity, politically separate from Portugal. I am taking the notion of freedom that is implied in the break from a colony and extending it to the African population in Brazil. The postcolonial moment for me, therefore, came with the end of slavery in 1888. Although Umbanda became a formal religion in 1908, after the postcolonial moment, much of its history came before that time. The term postcolonial cannot help but refer all things from the colonial past.

Race: A group of people linked by common ethnic and geographical ties. The geographical ties are based on continents, so the primary racial groups that I refer to in this work are Africans, Native Americans, and Europeans.

Regionalism: An emphasis on the varying ways that specific aspects of a national culture are practiced based on a geographical region within the nation. In this paper, regionalism refers mostly to how particular gods were and are worshipped.

Resistance: Opposition of a dominant mode within a culture. Here resistance refers mostly to challenging the way Christianity was practiced and forced upon the subservient African population in the Brazilian colony.

Syncretic, syncretize, syncretization: Bringing into sync, or hybridizing, discrete religious elements or practices.

CHAPTER 4 A Hard Pill to Swallow: What's Stan Got That I Don't?

The cornucopia has presented us with several courses to stuff in our mouth, including a final course that has not yet been explored—the theatre. In this section our mouth has the onerous task of masticating and determining the various flavors of the Afro Brazilian religion along with those of the theatre. How do these various dishes taste when contained in the same area? How can so many vastly different elements be swallowed into the esophagus and digested? Upon further exploration we may find that not only are there similar elements between this religion and theatre, but that many of the tenets of actor training (as epitomized by Stanislavski's method) are fulfilled in the practice of Umbanda.

For the purposes of this study, I chose to attend an Umbanda religious service in a congregation in São Paulo on a Friday night in early March of 2004. Based on the type of work that is being done or the type of problem one wants addressed, it is customary to choose an evening to attend the religious center.[7] Each center will assign particular nights

[7] Umbanda congregations can come together at *terreiro*s as little as once per month or as often as four times weekly. The more often a *terreiro* holds services, the more differentiated their services are in terms of the types of spirits that are evoked.

of the week or days of the month for specific spirit types to give counsel.[8] For example, most congregations assign Fridays to the mischievous spirits called Exus. Infamous for having been pimps, prostitutes, politicians, or corrupt religious leaders during their human lifetimes in colonial Brazil (or in other far-removed eras in Europe), Exus work in religious centers to help people fight against black magic. I knew that encountering one of these spirits was a guarantee of a highly performative evening.

As I arrived at the *terreiro* in the mid to late evening that Friday night, I knew that my friends (two Brazilians and one American) and I would shortly become future spectators and participant actors. We were greeted by a woman at the door leading into the concrete building in a lower middle class neighborhood where the service was to be held.[9] This woman was an Umbandista, a person who has completed the training to become a medium, helper, or musician in the religion. She accepted from each of us a donation of one Brazilian Real (the equivalent of thirty cents), and then passed out to each person a small card.[10] These cards were our programs, and they had on them one or more names and a number. The first name on the card was that of the medium with whom we would be working. In theatrical terms this medium was a director, a person who was trained within the guidelines of the Umbanda form to direct a number of spirits from the religion. In another sense, this medium was also a stage, in fact one of the various stages that were

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[8] Throughout the history of the religion the different spirits have had specific days associated with them. This generally determines which day of the week *terreiro*s assign for the spirits to perform the service of consultation.

[9] The sexes of the various roles being played here are not prescribed by the religion, though there are far more women who participate in Umbanda than men.

[10] Many *terreiro*s suggest a small donation, others leave the amount of the donation for people to decide, and the most prosperous of the centers ask for no donation at all. The donations are used to pay the bills of the

utilized in the religious service. The medium, a person, could act as a stage in that her or his body was the place that spirits would inhabit to enact their roles in the various drama like the one that was shortly to unfold. The additional names on the cards were the stock cast of spirits that worked with the particular medium on a regular basis.

Before allowing my friends and me to enter, the Umbandista at the door instructed us to take off our shoes as a sign of respect for the ritual space of the *terreiro*.[11] Upon entering, I noticed several rows of chairs or pews for people who were not Umbandistas initiates at this particular center. This seating area was the theatre's equivalent of the house, where audiences were expected to remain and observe the performances while adhering to the religion's rules and conventions. By the time my companions and I seated ourselves, we were already involved as spectators in what I call the religious event of an Umbanda center. The religious event encapsulates all the events that take place within the context of a given evening at an Umbanda center, from the preparations that happen before anyone outside of the religion arrives until the moment the last person leaves the *terreiro*. In terms of the conventions that can be found in both, it is this religious event that I posit as being an equivalent to an evening of theatre performance.

Approaching the *terreiro*, we engaged the religious event in our communal feeling of anticipation for the various types of interactions and spectacles to come. This anticipation continued after we sat down, for in front of the seats was a curtain serving as a wall behind which there was much audible activity. We could hear the movement and

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*terreiro*s, as well as to keep them supplied with ritual effects such as cigars, cigarettes, different herbs, and a variety of alcoholic drinks for the spirits to consume after they have possessed practitioners of the religion.

mumblings of Umbandistas preparing the ritual space behind the curtain. The feelings that I, my friends, and the entire audience were experiencing pushed aside our usual roles as students, bankers, secretaries, mothers, sons, and even friends to one other. Instead we constituted an audience of spectators experiencing an excitement similar to that which permeates the house of a theatre before the opening night of a show.

After waiting for several minutes in my seat before the curtain, I heard several drum beats followed by a salutary chant given by the head priestess of the *terreiro*. Her chant was responded to by the rest of the Umbandistas as well as many of the audience members in front of the curtain who were familiar with the chant, or what I envision as a script. This part of the Umbanda religious event marked a shift in my level of participation as the audience and I were now acting out part of the script. This script was based on a call-and-response—a remainder from African religious traditions—that rendered the audience members both spectators and actors simultaneously. While visually we were still experiencing audience anticipation from being seated before a curtain, vocally we were actors just as much as the head priestess and other Umbandistas who were chanting on the other side. In the theatre this would be akin to a pre-show that involved the participation of the audience before the proscenium curtain was drawn revealing the stage behind the arch.

The religious event entered its next stage as the curtain was drawn back and steady drumming began interspersed with songs, chants, and prayers. The whole time, the head priestess was the caller—the person who called out the initial chants or started the prayers

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[11] Some centers don't require people to take off their shoes until they enter specific demarcated spaces within

or songs—to which everyone else responded. The speaking and singing included chants, prayers, and songs that were sometimes Catholic, sometimes Yoruba in origin. During this part of the phase the priestess was the lead actor, guiding the rest of the spectator/actors in the performance of the script by way of call-and-response.

After a series of songs, prayers, and chants were performed by the congregation, the Umbandistas who would be serving as mediums enacted *ablutions* in order to clear themselves of any negative energy. I thought of these *ablutions* as a combination of blocking and stage business, and they included drawing sacred geometrical shapes with chalk on the floor or with fingers on their bodies, blowing or wafting smoke, and dispersing negative energy by a combination of clapping and snapping around and along their bodies. These *ablutions* marked another shift in the performance, a different scene if you will, where the mediums were preparing themselves for another mode of acting. Thus far, the Umbandista mediums were performing the same call-and-response script as the people seated on the other side of the space formerly divided by a curtain. During this new stage of the evening, the mediums performed *ablutions* in order to call to the spirits—this evening the Exus—that were to possess them. When the mediums performed everything correctly, the Exu with whom each one worked responded by entering the body of its host.

Meanwhile, the audience and I remained silent in our seats watching as the mediums underwent a transformation to allow spirits to enter their bodies and take over the stage as actors. From the audience, this process of the mediums yielding their bodies to

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the *terreiros*; others do not concern themselves with whether or not people take off their shoes.

the spirits was not gentle. The mediums (also called *cavalos*[12]) seemed to experience any number of psychosomatic changes including (among others) dilated or rolled-back eyes, convulsions, heavy breathing, grunting, wailing, and speech alterations, as well as fits of writhing on the floor like a snake, a type of movement associated with the Exus. At this point, helpers entered the scene and participated in what on the conventional stage would look like supporting roles. Called *cambonos*, these were initiates who were not possessed and were assigned the responsibility of tending to the needs of those in highly altered states of consciousness. They remained at the side of the mediums, making sure they would not lose balance as the spirits entered them. The helpers eventually led the spirits in the bodies of their host mediums to a space designated for the next phase of the religious event, the consultation sessions.

Thus far the performance space in the Umbanda center was everything located behind the fourth wall once occupied by the white curtain. As spirits, mediums, and helpers prepared for consultation sessions, what could be construed of as the stage multiplied and transformed. Mediums were located along the perimeter of what used to be the stage, leaving about a five-foot radius between them and the next medium. Some spirits were inclined to draw a line and/or a variety of sacred geometry within or along the perimeter to delineate this performance space; others forewent any drawing and left it to others to ascertain and respect their designated space. Helpers, people in the audience that came for consultation, and even other spirit/mediums were allowed to enter into any of

[12] Cavalo (kav´alu) means horse in Portuguese. Several West African religions involving spirit possession refer to mediums as horses for the spirits to ride.

these mini stages, but each radius unmistakably belonged to a particular spirit/medium designated to work in that area.

The script of this part of the Umbanda religious event also differed from the earlier stages. Earlier in the evening, the script was primarily call-and-response, whereas the dominant mode of communication of the consultation was improvisational dialogue. The first name on my card indicated the particular medium I was to speak with, Edgar; the third name, Mirim, was the Exu spirit that he normally allowed to possess him for consultations. As I watched from my seat other people going to mediums for their consultations, I was still a spectator. When I walked up to Edgar and the consultation began, I too became an actor as the dialogue began between the Exu, the helper, and myself.

This evening was different for both Edgar and me. The Exu that was inhabiting Edgar's body was not the Mirim that I saw on the card, but rather an unnamed Exu that made his first appearance that evening. I noticed something a little more menacing about this spirit/medium than I had seen in the past when I saw him playing with a large knife in a way that endangered both the body of the medium and the clients that came to see him. When it was my turn to receive a consultation, I approached with a little trepidation. I knew however that I was not alone with the spirit in the space designated as his stage. The helper came and met me on the way to the consultation, and I told her what everyone in the center already knew, "My name is Corey and I'm an American so I may need help with translation."

"No problem," the short, middle-aged woman assured me. I knew that she would remain at my side for the duration of the session to offer assistance. The helper was not

only going to help me but also the Exu by attending to the eating, drinking, and smoking needs of the spirit, transcribing specific directions given by the spirit for me, and helping to overcome any language difficulties that arose.[13]

Even though the helper and I approached, the Exu was still consumed with what he was doing. At that moment, he was using the knife he had been playing with earlier to cut into a small cake that the helper had brought to him. The cake was even more an indulgence for the spirit as he had just finished pouring rum over it. To reiterate, Exu spirits once led seedy lives as pimps, prostitutes, politicians, or corrupt religious figures. While they offered the service of spiritual consultation and protection against dubious magic, it was not uncommon for them to exhibit the vices of their former human lifetimes once in the body of a medium. Once I came within about five feet of the Exu, his head perked up as he scanned over me. "Who is this," he asked, acknowledging that I had entered the radius of space that was his stage.

The helper was quick to make the necessary introduction, "This is a foreign man, sir. He's not from our land, he's from far away." The spirit looked around with mischievous interest, as if to be sure that no one else knew this secret.

"He's not from here," he whispered to the helper, oblivious to the fact that she was speaking loudly enough for the whole *terreiro* to hear.

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[13] Most spirits speak in any one of a variety of particular vocal and linguistic alterations reflecting the dialect of their human lifetimes. As many of the spirits are hundred of years old and from different regions of the country, their speech reflects a Portuguese no longer spoken and difficult for many Brazilians to understand. Likewise, the spirits are often unfamiliar with jargon and grammatical changes in contemporary Portuguese. It is, therefore, the job of the helper to modernize and clarify the spirit's parlance, as well as to simplify the idiom of contemporary Portuguese for the nonhuman entity.

"No sir," she said, "He's from a faraway land, so please speak slowly to him sir." This whole exchange brought a smile to my face, for I was always able to speak and comprehend better than the people in most Umbanda centers believed at first. I found, however, that asking helpers to make such an introduction would ensure that I did not miss any aspect of the interactions. Furthermore, it often made for interesting exchanges such as the one that was presently taking place.

For this Exu I had now become the equivalent of a child that was hard of hearing. He proceeded to speak with me very slowly and loudly. "Do you speak Portuguese?"

"Yes sir, I speak Portuguese." At this point some of the other people in the center started to take notice as the spirit and I were bridging languages, continents, and centuries in our brief question and answer.

"You are not from here?"

"No sir, I'm not from here."

"Where are you from?" The pace of the conversation was painfully slow for me. Thankfully, the helper (also believing that I was the equivalent of a five-year-old) jumped in.

"He's from another shore. He's from the United States, sir."

At this point the Exu possessing the body of a different medium, the head priestess, seized the opportunity to share her knowledge from across the room. "This boy is from the Unities Stated," she proclaimed with in a deep, bellowing tone.[14]

[14] This was my attempt to render into English a mispronunciation on the part of the spirit. Much like in Spanish, the Portuguese words for the United States are os Estados Unidos. This particular spirit pronounced

A few of the people around to hear the mispronunciation made no attempt to hide their chuckles at the verbal mangling of my country of origin. "You mean the United States," chimed in the helper.

"Just like I said," responded the spirit in the head priestess, "The Unities Stated."

By this point the interest of Edgar's spirit was peaked. "Ah so you speak English," he asked.

"Yes sir, I speak English."

The Exu was incredulous. "Then say something for me."

"Something for me," I repeated back to him in English.

"What does that mean," said Edgar's spirit, fascinated that I could easily produce words in English.

"It means, something for me, sir." All the people around were confused at what I had said, but the Exu inhabiting Edgar was quick to understand that I was being a smart aleck.

"This one is smart, smart and quick," the Edgar's spirit observed, "and he's got good energy too… Really good energy. Hmmm…"

The spirit seemed rather fascinated with me, and while his unusual level of fascination could have caused me some discomfort, I felt even more relaxed as he almost unconsciously put down the large knife he was wielding earlier. "You know I can speak English," he exclaimed as a jovial child at show-and-tell.

"Really?"

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my homeland Estads Unidas. While it may seem like a small adjustment on paper, it made for quite a

"Yes… well mostly sing actually. Listen!" At that point he began singing lines from a number of Beatles songs in broken and muddled English. Our conversation up until that point had already been an improvisational script bridging gaps of time and continental divide; this linguistic performance was a humorous surprise that I could not have anticipated. "Sing something for me," he requested at the end of his medley.

"Sing what?"

"Anything, sing anything in English." What he and much of the congregation ended up hearing was *Amazing Grace*. To my surprise, a few Brazilians present even joined in and sang with me in English.

"Excellent, excellent… You know I speak another language."

"Really sir?"

"Yes, I speak the same language that Jesus did."

"Aramaic?"

"What?"

"You speak Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke?" I could assume that the spirit was probably just lying to impress. Maybe he spoke the language and the word for the language in Aramaic is not what I called out to him. "Can I hear some?" He proceeded to talk in what seemed to be incoherent gibberish. "Thank you, sir," I said warmly, with maybe a bit of a smile on my face.

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humorous pronunciation.

"So what are you here for today," asked the Exu, quickly changing the direction of the conversation. "You don't have major problems; your energy is so good," he said, resuming that somewhat eerie tone of fascination.

At this point I was put into a somewhat difficult, yet familiar position. People not formally initiated in the Umbanda religion attend services such as the one taking place that evening for one reason: to get spiritual counseling on any number of issues they have in their lives. Cheating significant others, financial woes, death in the family, missing items—these were the usual cases that spirits in *terreiro*s attended to. While the head priestess of this particular center had students of anthropology attend services to collect data in the past, most spirits were not accustomed to being interviewed. I had run into this before, and so I usually prepared a list of questions to which I could use an answer. By this point in my research, however, I had asked everything that I was looking for help on, and had to fall back on a failsafe question, "I'm thinking about moving to Brazil one day, and I want to know what you see in my future."

"The young man wants to come live in this land? This is a good thing, a boy with good energy like you…" He continued with the details he saw for my future, namely a timeline of when I should come and what I should do artistically after arriving in Brazil to stay. For the Exu class of spirits this was an unusually light job, for most people attended Umbanda *terreiro*s to see Exus with serious matters requiring much metaphysical attention. When normally faced with duties such as guarding people against unwanted spiritual possession, fending off malicious spells, and dispelling curses, the advice for which I asked made for a rather light conversation. Usually the spirits would perform

ablutions on the client, snapping or blowing smoke at them, or having them drink herbal concoctions in order to assure the efficacy of the spiritual work being done. This Exu merely asked me to lean forward so he could draw a symbol and blow on my head.

The helper remained at my side most of the time. Though she realized early on that I didn't need much in the way of help with translation or transcription, she hung around a while for the sheer entertainment value of the interaction. The helper was somewhat of a spectator, being less involved in the improvisational script taking place between the spirit and myself. The Exu and I were actors on stage, the stage being the radius given to the medium to do his spiritual work. The props included the knife, rum, and cake provided to the Exu upon request earlier in the evening, and even though they were put aside early in the course of our interaction, he still wore icing on his face.

When our improvisational exchange ended, the Exu drew some more geometry on me and bid me farewell. Our interaction lasted for almost an hour, a lot longer than the five to ten minutes that most sessions last. By the time I returned to my seat, many of the other spirit/mediums had finished seeing all of their clients and the spirits left the bodies of their hosts (a process bringing about the same psychosomatic symptoms exhibited when the spirits entered bodies earlier in the evening). The religious event then entered into its final phase in which—as in earlier phases—the head priestess led the congregation of spectators in a series of call and response songs, chants, and prayers to end the service. After singing our final songs and chanting our final chants, my friends and I handed in our cards, collect our shoes, and left the *terreiro* to return to our respective homes, jobs, and societal roles.

Having related one of my evenings as a spectator to the proceedings of an Umbanda center, I now turn attention to some key points of Stanislavski's system to answer the question, "What's Stan got that I don't?" I propose that these key points of the system are in some way fulfilled by the regular events that occur in the Umbanda religion. The desired effects and affects that these key points accomplish on stage—whether the stage is in a conventional theatre or in a *terreiro*—provide a bridge into utilizing elements of the Afro Brazilian religion to create a system for actor training. The first point of the system that I would like to explore is the "magic if."

A great number of actors at some point suffer the task of adopting and conveying a world that is far removed from their normal reality (and the reality of the audience for which they are performing). Stanislavski's answer to this suffering was the "magic if," which he explained as the following:

> It is as though [the actor] says to himself: 'I know that everything by which I am surrounded on the stage… is all make-believe. But if it were real… this is how I would act…' And from the instant that his soul is aware of the magic phrase 'if it were,' the actual world around him ceases to interest him, he is carried off to another plane, to a life created by imagination. (*Legacy* 188-89)

According to Shomit Mitter this "magic if" both acknowledges and eschews the reality that actors so often find constraining.

> […] the actor must acknowledge that the objects with which he is surrounded are only stage properties, fictional objects in a constructed

> world […] However […] Stanislavski immediately goes on to dismiss all this as 'crude' and 'having no significance.' What he is really interested in […] is the truth of the *imaginary* situation on stage – the truth of the world of the character. (7-8)

As such, this concept has always been implicitly understood by audiences watching plays in scenes of make-believe. The "magic if" ensures the audience that their reality is being respected and that they are safe to suspend their disbelief in order to enjoy and be consumed by the artificial world conveyed by the actor as if it were real. Stanislavski merely did students and performers at the Moscow Art Theatre and throughout the world the favor of making this knowledge an explicit part of actor training.

This implicit knowledge of make-believe that characterizes the "magic if" has always been a part of the Umbanda religion as well. I do not in any way contend that the Afro Brazilian religion's belief in spirit possession is not real, however this supernatural phenomenon does challenge what is generally known and accepted as physically possible. That the body of a woman in the 21st century can simultaneously contain not only her own consciousness, but that of another being alive several centuries prior, challenges the mundane senses that people use to survive. Even the existence of spirits without bodies goes beyond the normal bounds of typical sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing. From my personal experience and conversations with other people experiencing the religion, no one actually sees a spirit moving into the body of a medium. No audible ring or similar sound is heard denoting that a spirit has left the building. Yet, the people in the congregation

understand and behave as if the spirit of a 17th-century Native American has indeed inhabited the body of a white, middle-aged Brazilian woman in the year 2004.

Of course there are those people present who choose not to believe. Sometimes the vast majority of the Umbanda center's audience does not believe the performance of someone possessed. If the actor, in this case the consciousness of the spirit and the body that it inhabits, is not performing the role correctly—i.e. the physicality, gesture, vocal patterns, and personality traits particular to the type of spirit—the religious congregation understands that the performance is bogus. This is no different from the theatre: if the performer does not completely believe in the world she is portraying, neither will her audience.

Another principle from the Stanislavski system that I would like to explore is the notion of "given circumstances." In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski wrote under the guise of a fictional director named Tortsov that action on stage should never be gratuitous:

> On the stage there cannot be, under any circumstances, action which is directed immediately at the arousing of a feeling for its own sake [...] All such feelings are the result of something that goes on before. Of the thing that goes on before you should think as hard as you can. As for the result, it will produce itself. (38)

Productive creation on stage is only made possible by creating and being informed by given circumstances. According to Tortsov, "[…] *if* gives the push to dormant imagination, whereas the *given circumstances* build the basis for *if* itself" (48).

This idea of exploring the given circumstances is also a part of the Umbanda religion. Each god, goddess, saint, spirit class, and individual therein all has the specific stories with which they came into the religion. As part of their training to become mediums, initiates in Umbanda are taught and quizzed on the details of these stories. They are therefore well studied in the given circumstances of the spirits that will possibly take possession of their bodies. As the helpers in the religious center go through the same training, they also carry this knowledge into the consultation sessions and can assist those people from the community that are not as well versed in the spirits' histories. For example the caboclo spirits have a very specific way of greeting others. This involves rhythmic dipping at the knees and touching one of their shoulders to the opposite shoulder of the person with whom they are communicating. As these spirits are very sensitive to protocol, the helpers—aware of the circumstances of bridging the worlds and values of the 21st century with those of 16th- or 17th-century Native Americans—make sure to guide people in greeting the caboclos correctly. In general, people attending the Umbanda centers for consultation have at least a fair amount of knowledge about the class of spirits that they are coming to see, as well as the protocol at the religious center. Furthermore, members of the community are well aware of the details in their lives—their own given circumstances—that will later form part of the script in the consultation with a spirit.

Finally I would like to explore within the context of Umbanda Stanislavski's concepts of unit, objective, and super-objective. As Tortsov, Stanislavski posits that a play should be divided into digestible units, and each of those should have an objective—a motivating impulse that can be put in the form of a simple verbal phrase—that will push

the action forward (*An Actor Prepares* 107-112). When actors conceive of appropriate objectives, the impulse 'to kill the person on stage' or 'to make love to the hero' forces the play to move along in a compelling way. For Stanislavski all these objectives must serve the goals and themes of the play's plot, which he calls the super-objective. "In a play the whole stream of individual, minor objectives, all the imaginative thoughts, feelings, and actions of an actor, should converge to carry out the *super-objective* of the plot" (256).

The events at a night in an Umbanda *terreiro* are divided into units, the objectives of which have already been mentioned. The first part of the evening can be framed as a gathering in the religious center, and its objective is for all human members participating in the events to congregate. The next section of the evening, which can be called the invitation to the spirits, has the objectives of clearing the space of negativity and inviting the spirits in to conduct the work of consultation. Then the consultations comprise the next unit of the evening, and their objectives are to give and obtain guidance in relation to worldly problems. The final unit of the evening shares its name with its objective, the closing of the religious event. Each of these units' objectives is fulfilled by the several people and spirits involved, each of whom have their own objectives. For example, to accomplish the objective of clearing the space and inviting in the spirits, some mediums have, as a smaller objective, the performance of *ablutions* to clear their bodies for possession. The mediums, head priest or priestess, and the numerous people from the community also have during this unit the task or mini-objective of correctly singing songs and chants. All the events of the evening are performed with the super-objective in mind of performing healing work and achieving spiritual advancement.

Chapter 4 Glossary

Ablution: Any action taken to symbolically purify oneself for spiritual or religious purposes.

Congregation: The building or physical location where Umbanda is practiced. I use this word interchangeably with religious center and the correct Portuguese word, *terreiro*.

Spirit/Medium: This is how I refer to a medium that is possessed by a spirit, as the medium is carrying both consciousnesses. This phenomenon is not unlike the actor's relationship to her character.

CHAPTER 5 Churned Together: Umbanda Performs Theatre

I am certainly not the first person who attempted to mix the Umbanda religion together with the theatre. Indeed, even nonhuman entities have connived to enter the two into dialogue. In 1972, Saulo, now a seasoned high priest at an Umbanda Center in São Paulo, bore witness to the results of an errant spirit making an attempt to debut on what was otherwise a normal stage for political theatre. At the time Saulo was an activist/artist in his early twenties. Recruited by a local underground political celebrity, he acted in several plays that spoke against the military dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas. Early in the rehearsal process of one of the plays, his acting troupe was having difficulty finding someone to convincingly play the part of a young girl in her late teens; then the solution to this dilemma literally popped up before the performers. To the director's delight the local teenaged girl who ran a mobile popcorn stand was both able and excited to play the role. The rehearsals continued, and after a few weeks the troupe filled the house with family, friends, and community members eager to see their labor come to fruition. The first performance began and all was proceeding smoothly when the young girl dropped suddenly to the floor and began writhing around the stage. Eyes half-closed and rolled back, she was clearly demonstrating blocking that was different from what had been rehearsed. Both her co-actors and almost all of the audience members were paralyzed by

what seemed to be a truly demented, if inspired break from the script. The young girl's mother, however, recognized that this occurrence was another type of performance, and was able to take action accordingly.

A high priestess of Umbanda, the teenager's mother recognized that the writhing body on the ground was not her daughter, but rather a mischievous Exu spirit making its debut on stage. To reiterate, the Exu class of spirits is known for having once upon a time been prostitutes, pimps, or disingenuous religious or political figures. It is noteworthy that all of these occupations have a highly performative persona, bringing to question the motivation for the Exu's debut.[15] At any rate, the debauched morals of their human lifetimes are often reflected in the snakelike physicality that the priestess could easily recognize. She had never, however, seen such an occurrence in her daughter. (While the young girl was socialized in the Umbanda community, she was neither initiated into the religion nor had she ever been possessed to her mother's knowledge.) Nevertheless the process for intervening in an unsuspected possession was the same at this theatre as it was in an Umbanda center. It was easy for the priestess to coax and ultimately eject the Exu from her daughter; it took less than 20 minutes from the original break in the performance for the young girl to pick up where she left off in the play. The additional spectacle aside, Saulo considered the performance to be successful (Garroux).

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[15] While I make no claims to deeply understand the particular and individual consciousness of the various spirits of Umbanda, it seems that entities would gravitate towards that to which they are accustomed. I wonder therefore if spirits comfortable with performing both before (as humans) and during (as spirits) their involvement with the Afro Brazilian religion would be drawn to the stage as such because it is yet another opportunity to perform before an audience. Was this particular Exu a ham? Another possibility is that there is something inherently similar between the psychophysical states of performing theatre and experiencing spirit possession that would facilitate such a change of performance venues.

The interaction of Umbanda and the actor on stage does not always have to yield such disruptive, uncontrollable results. Over 25 years after this first case, one of Saulo's students utilized aspects of the religion to make for a more felicitous union of theatrical stage and spiritual practice. In 1996 a young man by the name of Gilson was cast to play a lead role in Luigi Pirandello's *Right You Are, If You Think You Are*. As both a traditionally trained actor and an initiate of Umbanda at Pablo's center in São Paulo, Gilson had enough experience with both forms to make unlikely comrades of an absurdist playwright and an African god.

In 1917 Pirandello's *Right You Are, If You Think You Are* baffled the existential notions of Italian audiences. In this play, the lifestyle of the newly arrived Signor Ponza, his wife, and his mother-in-law challenged the thinking and curiosity of the citizens of an unnamed fictive town. Ponza brought his wife and mother-in-law to this town after an earthquake decimated their nearby village and most of its inhabitants. While Ponza was a most competent government secretary, the restrictions he placed on his family piqued the interest of his new fellow townspeople. The fact that he disallowed his wife from seeing his mother-in-law, Signora Frola, provoked the upstanding citizens of this town to investigate the matter with more than average fervor.

Against the wishes of both Signora Frola and Ponza, who often became highly physically agitated and emotionally erratic upon inquiry into his family's matters, the townspeople did not relent in their investigation. First they uncovered that both the agitated husband and the kindly mother-in-law believed each other crazy and that they both convinced the wife to pander to their respective manias. Ponza's particular state of mental

health was predicated on a nervous breakdown over the death of his first wife that had never really happened. His jealousy over his current wife (whom he refused to accept was really the same woman he believed dead) was so strong that he shut her off from everyone in the world including her own mother. Signora Frola's mental state supposedly arose from her refusal to accept the death of her daughter, Ponza's first wife. If this seems confusing, it truly is; the townspeople were almost driven to insanity themselves trying to decode which of the two was really insane. The town tried several times to solve the mystery until they finally queried the wife, Signora Ponza, if she was Ponza's first wife (thus admitting her husband's craziness) or his second (thereby verifying Signora Frola's almost psychotic denial of her daughter's death). To everyone's chagrin, Signora Ponza answered that she was both, eliminating her selfhood in order to pacify the people around her. Both Signor Ponza and Signora Frola were crazy, yet both were perfectly normal. This was enough to drive anyone insane.

When Gilson was cast as Signor Ponza, he decided to approach the character through the lens of his religion. He found that Ponza in many ways mirrored Ogum, the Yoruba god of war. At first there may not seem to be any real similarities between the two. Ogum was also an African god of the forge, and therefore spent most of his time either on the battlefield or creating weapons for the next battle. Signor Ponza, however, was an Italian petit bourgeois, preparing documents as a clerk and a secretary to eek out an existence—not much war to be had in small-town Italy. Gilson found, however, in many of the mythic stories of Ogum several points of entry into the character he was to play on stage.

According to Umbanda mythology, before man was created the Yoruba deities were in search of a home on Earth. Ogum's weapon of choice being the cutlass or machete, he set about clearing the path to what became , Ile Ife, Nigeria, the home of his siblings. Similarly Signor Ponza was the one who set out from the decimated ruins of his hometown to establish a new life and home in the fictive town of *Right You Are, If You Think You Are*.

Ogum was very much a loner. Destined to reign as king of all his sister and brother Orixás, he deserted Ile Ife and the crown to live alone in the forests where he could forge weapons and prepare for battle in relative solitude. Ponza was also a loner, preferring to spend time only with his mother-in-law and wife separately after work. While they valued their privacy, both jealously guarded what bit of romance they allowed into their lives. Ponza kept his wife locked in a domicile outside of town, not even allowing maids or other servants to take away from his sole affection and possession of her. While Ogum was not quite as obsessive about his devoted wife Iansã, he only allowed his one friend, the charismatic god Xangô, to visit his home. Unfortunately for Ogum, Xangô's charisma overpowered Iansã's loyalty; they soon ran off together leaving Ogum abandoned.

Upon being interrogated and made to face his mother-in-law in public, Ponza unleashed bursts of erratic, violent emotional displays, only to snap back into his relatively calm "normal" demeanor after Signora Frola left his presence. Ogum experienced a similar almost psychotic episode when he became drunk before leading a regimen of his most faithful human warriors to battle. Upon meeting his troops, his drunken state allowed him to believe that he had already arrived at the battlefield. He let his emotions loose

through his cutlass, and when he awoke from his hazy stupor, he had destroyed the entire lot of his most loyal subjects.

Gilson modeled Signor Ponza's physicality after a specific path of Ogum. In this case, Gilson utilized the model of Ogum Xoroque (see table 2). This path of Ogum is highly associated with the trickster archetype, adding even more of a disruptive element into the mix of a warrior's temperament and impatience. This is the most violent, irate, and unstoppable path of Ogum. Whereas other variants of the god are concerned with more docile matters such as collecting iron from the Earth and tending the forge, Ogum Xoroque's primary concern is doing battle. Focusing on this path of Ogum made perfect sense to Gilson; the façade of a normal family that Signor Ponza attempted to maintain harkened to the prankster nature of this facet of the Yoruba god.

Gilson built the physicality of his Signor Ponza with Ogum Xoroque's constantly irate nature in mind (and in body as it were). He maintained constant twitches while in the more subdued "normal" state of Signor Ponza. When his character lost its composure at various points in the play, Gilson allowed himself to be guided by the stereotypical movements that occur when the god of war possesses a subject: while maintaining rhythmic foot patterns, he slashed his cutlass before him, clearing his path of all obstacles. This must have made for a quite memorable performance of the absurdist play (Martins).

Unlike the first case of political theatre in the seventies, Gilson never felt that he was in danger of experiencing possession on stage. Indeed the show's run proceeded without any such incident. It is noteworthy again that in Umbanda, the orixás are leagues above all the other spirits (like the exu from the first case) in the religious hierarchy.

While the lower spirits are apt to possess mediums at any time, the orixás are far too important to take on the bodies of humans. Unlike the young woman possessed by a lowly mischievous exu in 1972, Gilson's use of the orixá Ogum invited little risk of possession.

As the art of acting and the theatre become more accessible to people of various demographics throughout Brazil, the case of Gilson offers a possible model for character construction to those artists who do not have the luxury of studying the Stanislavski system at a conservatory. Gilson had been trained at a studio in São Paulo in Stanislavski's method, and while that may have facilitated his process of constructing Signor Ponza from Ogum, it is my belief that performers as him could disseminate the use of Umbanda archetypes, movements, and stories to the underprivileged who either practice or have a familiarity with the religion and would like pursue the acting profession. In the next portion, In The Gut Now,' I will explore how these archetypes, and stories can not only comprise a system of actor training, but can also reinforce cultural competency in a country that is a jambalaya of religious and ethnic influences.

CHAPTER 6 In the Gut Now: Umbanda and Actor Training

As we have now passed through the stomach where we have seen a few of the many potentialities available as theatre and Umbanda are been churned together, we move to the small intestines—the gut, the home of uptake and absorption—to envision a method through which Umbanda could be absorbed into contemporary theatre practice. As we proceed into the backbone of this method, I would like to highlight that a secondary goal of this approach is to bring about cultural literacy and awareness of Brazil's historical diversity.

It is interesting to note that the implementation of the following techniques would have to take on a form highly similar to that of the syncretism from which they arise. While quite possibly the most widely practiced non-Chrisitan religion in Brazil today, Umbanda suffers from serious ridicule and lack of acceptance. Though Catholicism has been relatively flexible in its coexistence with African-derived religions, there has been a significant rise of less tolerant evangelical and other protestant variants of Christianity in the last decade. Catholics still comprise the vast majority in the country, and though they may disagree with many of the protestant religions arriving in the country's spiritual scene of late, they seem to have more in common on the surface with the newcomers than with religions from what they may still conceive of as the Dark Continent.

Ironically, Umbanda and other African-derived religions also concomitantly enjoy support from Brazil's department of tourism, for such spiritual practices attract people from around the world to spend money throughout the year. The numerous festivals that are held for the orixás all over the country bring people from all over the western hemisphere and Africa who also celebrate religions based on Yoruba traditions. In a country with a mixed reception of African-based religions, the teaching of this performance method must be carefully executed to insure that not only people who are involved in or receptive to Umbanda, but also those who are Catholic (and maybe even Protestant) would be inclined to participate. I believe a syncretic approach to acting would be the most appropriate way to proceed.

This syncretic approach would take root in archetypal narrative as a point of departure for acting. The stories of Umbanda's and Catholicism's archetypal deities and saints are so rich that they could provide a very Brazilian platform for Stanislavski's concept of "what if." Through these archetypal figures, a wide variety of specific emotional states and dramatic conflicts can be explored and illuminated. Let us take for example the stories of the Umbanda archetypal figure Iansã and her sister in syncretism, the Catholic figure Saint Barbara. Iansã has several hallmark stories associated with her. A good example is of her and Ossaim (osa´ĩj), a lesser god of herbs. Iansã was very devoted to her husband Xangô, who was not very fond of Ossaim. Without any encouragement from her husband, Iansã decided to harass the god of herbs to win Xangô's favor. Being the goddess of the wind and storm, she blew up several gusts of wind while Ossaim was gathering his various flora, thus sending herbs flying all about the homeland of the Yoruba

gods. Iansã then basked in the glory as she watched the other gods help Ossaim chase his healing ingredients about the kingdom.

To reiterate, Saint Barbara was the beautiful daughter of a prominent aristocrat in Asia Minor. Her father, Dioscorus, sensed the potential profit in marrying her off, and decided to keep her locked up in a tower until he found a rich suitor for her. During her time in the tower, her tutors taught her Christianity among other disciplines and she converted to the faith in fervor. Her chaste devotion to Jehovah was very much in contrast to her father, a non-Christian, whose lascivious lifestyle quickly evoked harsh excoriation from the devout Barbara. To this end, she waited for her father's absence to have three windows built into a bathhouse he was having constructed (ostensibly for less than honorable purposes) in order to honor the trinity. In response, Discorus publicly denounced her, ordered her tortured, and then beheaded her himself. Promptly thereafter lightning struck him dead. Though the stories of both these archetypal figures vary in details, what they both share is passionate devotion that led to extreme actions. This devotion would serve as great material to be workshopped.

On the basest level of training, the work would begin with mimesis, recreating the stories as they have been passed down. This would entail the Stanislavskian principles of the "magic if," "given circumstances," etc., without even having to frame them as such. The performers would be given the details of these stories and a workshop space in which to explore what such archetypal myths and legends would look like when transposed into 21st century human bodies and stages. While this task may seem daunting on some level, the performers would not be completely without a frame of reference.

An important part of this training would take place by observing people that practice the religions of the myths being explored. Quite simply, that would require the performers to astutely observe religious services at Umbanda centers and Catholic churches. They would observe what practitioners of these faiths look like in prayer, song, possession, etc.; what songs are being sung in congregations; what offerings are being made; what musical accompaniment is played during services; how quiet or boisterous services are—all these and many more facets of Brazilian religious life would be explored. Since a reasonable amount of the Brazilian population attends Catholic or Umbanda services, observational field trips would not be very difficult to organize. Since attending the services of a spiritual practice that is not their own would be research for theatre training, convincing performers to learn firsthand about other religions would be without agendas of conversion and therefore easier to accomplish. All of the chants, prayers, possession, and other such interactions in Umbanda centers and Catholic churches would serve as a library of experiential knowledge from which they would be able to draw in their mimetic recreations.

Whereas the forays into the religious worlds of the Church and the *terreiro* would be primarily experiential in nature, the training in the theatre workshop would be highly experimental as well as experiential. The performers would be encouraged to utilize elements from their observations of religious centers and worship in their recreations. One actor may feel compelled to sing a liturgical piece as two others play at the roles of Saint Barbara and her father. In the meantime, the remaining participants may decide to watch while kneeling as if at an altar with rosaries. Two different performers may decide to act

as if they were becoming possessed by Iansã and Ossaim before playing out the story to percussion and chants improvised on the body by a few of the other actors.

While I may be portraying these examples as an idyllic utopia of spiritual egalitarianism, it is actually the discord and discontent of performers in this process of religious representation that would lead to the next level of training within this paradigm. Undoubtedly performers are going to see on the surface of foreign religious practices interactions that they will not understand. Once they decided to represent these interactions in the context of the actor's workshop, the potential for conflict would increase as one actor providing accompaniment to the Umbanda tale might decide to chant as if he were an animal. Another actor may become highly offended as her colleague's representation of Saint Barbara's faith is exaggerated in a way so as to make a mockery of Catholicism. While such conflicts could break down the progress of workshops where a level of mutual trust and respect are preferred, such schisms also could provide a ripe forum for dialogue and understanding across cultures within the same country. In essence, if well facilitated, these exercises would not only accomplish a recreation of archetypal stories, but would also engage the performers in learning and dialoguing about various aspects of the culture in which they live.

As new aspects of the various religious cultures arise, the same archetypal stories would be recreated again. If the next rendition brings up more issues to be discussed and worked through, the actors could stop and engage in dialogue again, using any new information that arises to portray the stories yet another time. The actor's roles would rotate; audience members for one portrayal of Iansã's mischief may later play one of the

two gods. The performance of the myths would be repeated at least a few times, ensuring that all get to participate in the various renderings of the stories. The goal would not be to "get it right," but rather to bring out as many layers of cultural knowledge as possible from the myths and legends.

In the next session of workshopping these narratives, the ensemble would set about the task of revealing the untold stories within these myths and legends. Given the general questions, "Who are the characters that did not receive sufficient attention in these legends," and, "What are their stories," the students would be unleashed either individually or in groups to create new narratives which they could then present before one another. Two actors may decide that Saint Barbara and one of her tutors fell in love before she converted to Christianity. Several others may work with the chaos among all of the other gods of Umbanda as they tried to help Ossaim retrieve his herbs. The resulting scenes would be performed in front of the ensemble, ideally sparking dialgoue and further exploration. After sharing all of the new narratives, the ensemble would set about inserting these untold stories into the original legends to see how they would transform the originals.

In the following session these stories could be analyzed to find deeper psychological implications and motivations of the main characters. The facilitator would ask the ensemble of performers leading questions such as, "What type of love would Iansã have to have in order to wreak such mischief in the life of a god about whom she herself cared little about," or "What type of ego identification would Saint Barbara have to have in order to honor the trinity in her father's bathhouse of licentious pleasure?" In so doing, the

facilitator would give the actors a germ of an idea to workshop. This could be done by allowing performers to put into the form of a character their notion of crazy, devoted love or ego identification and have them perform for or with each other. Performers could also be divided into groups to workshop a scene epitomizing these ideas. In either case, dialogue about love or the ego would be required so as to illuminate everyone's opinions and experiences with the topics.

The physical training within this paradigm of acting would, like the narratives, come directly from syncretic Brazilian culture. In order to attain the strong supple bodies necessary to serve as an instrument in creating credible yet fictional worlds on stage, the ensemble would learn different movement forms from throughout Brazil. In order to keep in line with the musical elements of the aforementioned narrative work, capoeira and samba are the movement forms I would emphasize. Both forms are, indeed, syncretic, having influences from both Europe and Africa. Capoiera was composed of martial arts originating in central Africa along with dance and musical accompaniment that were adopted in colonial Brazil in order to disguise the often injurious movements. Samba was also composed of African and European influences, yet was always purely a dance form for both individuals and couples. Both these forms are physically challenging and provide strength and flexibility to those who practice them.

Like the proposed physical training, vocal training would also be highly influenced by aspects of syncretic Brazilian culture. In this case, the foundations of the vocal technique would be rooted in contemporary approaches to vocal training such as Linkletter or Roy Hart. The specific material, however, would come in part from the chants, songs,

prayers, and verses from Umbanda and Catholicism. Working with these religions to teach voice, movement, and acting technique would not be an attempt to force a religious practice on, preach to or convert any of the actors; rather, the goal would be twofold. First would be the use of the familiar, as epitomized by Brazilian spiritual practice, to explore the elements necessary to create and interpret meaningful stories for the theatre. Second would be to teach Brazilianness, i.e. the various cultures that have come together to create a nation of such multi-layered diversity and history. Through experimentation, experiential knowledge, and conflict resolution, performers engaging this training process would not only learn how mediums in religious centers embody spirits from different times, they would themselves embody the various aspects of history, race, and religion that make them 21st century Brazilians.

While this approach to training actors may seem more geared towards the level of community and cultural therapy, I believe it would provide a strong foundation for achieving and expressing the varied physical and emotional states found in contemporary theatre. Though I have not explored the possibilities of this paradigm with classical, canonical theatre works, the concept of transgressing time to tell stories should not prove a challenge for performers trained in this technique. In the stories of Iansã and Saint Barbara, the various workshops would have explored such concepts as devotion, madness, revenge, and (in the concurrent discussions between the performers) intercultural conflict and resolution—all of this from only two archetypal legends. Each orixá from Umbanda has several stories, and there are several more concepts to be covered in the innumerable myths and legends that come from the other saints and several spirit classes. There are no

types of emotions or conflicts that would not be covered, no range of expression that would not be absorbed from the churning together of theatre and Umbanda.

CHAPTER 7 Digestion and Indigestion: Products of the New Acting Paradigm

Looking at the body overall to see how well this anthropophagic process of Umbanda-based theatre training would be digested, we must turn our attention to the body of contemporary theatre training as a whole throughout Brazil. Brazilian courses of professional theatre study are in some ways similar to this proposed method of training. Most contemporary university and studio theatre programs throughout the country embrace "Brazilianness" in certain aspects of their programming. A survey of ten university programs revealed that numerous curricula nationwide incorporate a number of courses devoted specifically to Brazilian playwrights and styles of movement (*Escolas*). Ostensibly students in these university programs would learn something more about Brazilianness through such courses; though I believe this learning would be indirect at best, i.e. told through the eyes and opinions of Brazilian playwrights. For the most part, these programs focus on actor training according to their interpretation of the Stanislavski system.

The Stanislavski-based training is also prevalent in private studios throughout the country. The most highly acclaimed theatre company in the country, Grupo de Teatro Macunaíma, serves as a hallmark example. Acclaimed director Antunes Filho formed the

theatre company in 1978 to use Stanislavski's method of actor training to portray stories and plays that explore themes of Brazilian identity. Such was the acclaim of the group throughout the country in the late seventies that the city of São Paulo subsidized the formation of a home for the company and a school of actor training. The school has for almost 20 years taught actors throughout the country the art of Stanislavski's method (De Miranda).

What would happen when performers trained in this archetype-based acting method intersected with the more traditional theatre? I believe that they would be considered raw in their talent. As the proposed method of acting does not (yet) pay much attention to the language of classical texts, they may have some catching up to do in order to audition for conservatory programs, Shakespearean works, Greek classics, and so on. Yet what they would bring to the stage would leave quite an impression. They would be armed with a cache of emotional and physical capabilities covering much of the spectrum necessary to perform any role on stage. In addition, they would have gained from their forays into the religious world and various cultural dialogues an experiential knowledge of several aspects of the very Brazilianness that much of the country's contemporary theatre espouses. From their experimental explorations of archetypal narrative, they would be highly flexible in their ability to traverse centuries and continents in order to perform effectively on stage, whether it be in the role of Pirandello's Signora Frola (who could be conceived of as the orixá Nanã Buruku) or Beckett's Vladimir (easily a candidate for the god Exu). What they would lack in exposure to some aspects of the classical theatre they would compensate for with their competency as Brazilian citizens and performers. From the various cultural

influences that they would have digested in their training, they would prove to be highly digestible by Brazilian theatre.

What would happen after the contemporary Brazilian theatre consumes these performers? I believe the performers would have to address those aspects of the theatre that their training did not explore. In addition to classical language, they would have to embrace other approaches to acting and directing (though a great number of actors and directors subscribe to the Stanislavski system, there are those Brazilian artists who embrace different approaches as well). Overall, I believe their learning curve would be no more strenuous than that of actors trained via other methods. Ideally all performers are always learning something new about the craft; the theatre, after all, is an ever growing and changing entity, much like the world it purportedly mirrors.

While the theatre may have an easy time of digesting the products of this training method, the performers themselves may experience a varying range of responses to the traditional theatre. Having such a firm performance background, they may find themselves quite comfortable so as to adapt quickly and easily to the new techniques and approaches to the craft that they encounter. They may however find themselves quite discontented with the world of contemporary theatre into which they have entered. They may find much of the work they encounter to be vapid, lacking the gritty, intense cultural engagement to which they would have grown accustomed. They may even eschew the world of Brazil's contemporary theatre, or better yet consume it in order to bring the creative work on the country's stages to a new level.

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